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THE NEW HIGH GERMAN
PHONETIC SYSTEM.

Grundlagen des neuhochdeutschen Lautsystems. Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Schriftsprache im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert von KARL VON BÄHDER. Strassburg, Trübner: 1890. 8vo, pp. 284.

In this book another contribution to the solution of the complicated problem of the origin and basis of the Modern High German literary language has been added to those of BURDACH, KLUGE, and SOGIN. The author considers especially the phonetic side of the question and discusses in detail some of the more important phonological phenomena appearing in the formation of Modern High German. His task has been to state the dialectal relations as far as possible, and then trace the origin of the phonetic changes in Modern High German and sketch its history in the period in which the present sounds of the written language were in the main established. The investigation extends down to the appearance of the linguistic societies in the 17th century. The introduction affords us a survey of the outer form of the "common German language" in the 15th and 16th centuries, with special reference to the South German written language, which is very important for the phonetic form of the present literary language.

The Middle Ages could not produce a written language in the full sense of the word. The court-poetry of the 13th century did indeed employ a language which bore many characteristics of a written language. But there was no unity in its phonology, though certain dialectal forms were not admitted in rime. The vocabulary had a local coloring and admitted foreign elements, from the Netherlands and France, which were unknown to the popular language. In its syntax it had the stamp of a cultured language. It was, however, confined to narrow circles and could not claim universality. This poetic court-language, therefore, left only a few traces of itself in the later language when it disappeared in the 14th century. The roots of the New High German lie elsewhere. The official language employed in the chancellor's

office developed the first effectual activity toward the refinement of the written language. The classic Middle High German was a poetic language having but little influence upon prose, whereas the Modern High German began as prose and won its way later to the language of poetic literature. The language of the chancellor's office and official documents furnished not only the basis of Modern High German but gave it the unity of a phonetic system necessary for a written language. The chancellor's office performed for the German the same office that the press has performed for the English: it settled the spelling and prevented degeneration into untold dialectical differences. Not that all differences were excluded, but a norm was established which served to control in a measure the written language of the day. This official language preserved the older sounds and regulated them as far as possible; the official correspondence made it quite possible to do away with the worst dialectal peculiarities. In the last half of the 15th century this result had been nearly accomplished; the office of the imperial chancellor had the greatest influence, and this imperial chancellor's language began with Charles the Fourth. The great significance of the imperial official language consists in its influence upon the official language at other courts. The changes effected by the imperial official language began in the last decade of the 15th century.

The different dialects present five different tendencies in the "Common German": 1. Swabian-Bavarian (Augsburg); 2. Upper Rhenish (Basel, Strasburg); 3. Nurembergish; 4. Middle Rhenish (Worms, Mainz, Frankfurt); 5. Upper Saxon (Leipsic, Wittenberg). The first and second are upper German, the fourth and fifth are middle German, the Nurembergish principally upper German, though in some points inclining to middle German and finally becoming wholly so. As basis of the present written language are the two middle German tendencies, of which one receives its significance as the language of Luther, the other as that of the official documents of the empire, and appearing in the print of the most important book-markets of the 16th century.

There are two important periods in the development of the printed (book) language, of which one extends back to 1530. In the first the language had a local character, but approached gradually the "Common German." In the second the book language has the features of the "Common German," and only a few local differences remain; but upper and middle German differ in many points. Middle German exerts an influence upon upper German so that the latter assimilates the form of the former. In the 15th century a greater unity in the written language was attained by the printing-press. At first the printers followed the official language of the chancellor's office, but later became independent. They had their dialectal differences, but strove to make their books as accessible as possible to the general public; hence they used the most common German. Munich, Ingolstadt, and especially Augsburg, became the principal seats of the presses.

The dialects of Basel, Strasburg, Nuremberg, and other places, have retained many of their older peculiarities and some of these peculiarities have found a home in the present language. However, Luther's language as found in his writings, especially in his Bible, forms the basis of the Modern High German written language. Luther deserves the praise of having put the final stamp upon the written language then in the process of formation. In his translation of the Bible he strove to give the language as wide-spread a popularity as possible, hence his care in selecting the best and most widely understood language in all Germany. This inclined strongly to the Middle German. With Opitz there came a certain conclusion in the development of the language, as he broke entirely with the obsolete and dialectal forms and accepted Luther's language with certain modifications. The efforts of the grammarians of the 16th century contributed much to the unity of the written language, and the German dictionaries, already begun in the 15th century and in the first decades of the 16th, had a great influence upon the unification of the Modern High German.

Under the head of "Grammatische Abhandlungen" our author treats of the phonology of

the language. Here he discusses the signs employed to indicate the length or the shortness of the vowels, and traces the exceptions back to that stage in the language when custom fluctuated. The long discussion of the two vowel sounds *ä* and *e* is very interesting. The conclusion is as follows: "a natural result arising from the employment of *ä* according to etymological principles, as is now done in the written language, is that the original differences of the *e*-sounds are constantly disappearing in the pronunciation, which tends to conform to the writing. Now, the short vowels, both *e* and *ä*, are usually pronounced open, the long *e* and *ä* close. This pronunciation is exactly the opposite of the original one in middle Germany and came from the Netherlands, where the educated are less dependent on the dialect; nevertheless it bids fair to become the only accepted one, as it closes a long development in this direction."

The chapters on *o* from Mid. H. G. *ā*; *ö* from Mid. H. G. *e*; *ü* from Mid. H. G. *i*; *o* (*ö*) from Mid. H. G. *u* (*ü*); the umlaut of *u* in Mod. H. G.; and on the *au* and *äu*, are not only interesting but also instructive in the study of vowel changes. In the last case the *au* or *äu*, as *kauen wiederkauen*, *däuen verdauen*, *Gau*, or *Gäu*, is due to double forms in the older language. At present *äu* corresponds to a Mid. H. G. *ā* or *ou*; *au* to a Mid. H. G. *iu* or *ou*.

It would be impossible to mention all the interesting points discussed so fully and thoroughly in this book. We can only commend those who are especially interested in the development of Mod. H. G. to make a careful study of it, believing they will be well repaid for their labor.

SYLVESTER PRIMER.

Providence, R. I.

CORRESPONDENCE.

PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN AND THE AMERICAN DIALECT SOCIETY.

TO THE EDITOR OF MOD. LANG. NOTES:

SIRS:—May I say a few words to prevent possible misunderstandings of the table in Dr. LEARNED's article, in your April number, on